

MICKY JONES

One place you don't want to miss when in Nashville is the Grand Ole Opry. It's synonymous with country and western music.

# Nashville: The best there is in 'country'

By Carolyn DeMarco  
staff writer

The third best thing about Nashville is the air fare, \$19 one way from Detroit Metropolitan to Nashville International aboard Southwest Airlines in a promotion that continues until May.

Expect that for \$19, however, that you'll get no assigned seating, elbow-to-elbow discomfort and flexible scheduling — you'll leave when they're good and ready. Grin and bear it and remember how much you're saving.

Second best? The friendly people. Apparently, listening to all those sad songs about lost love, illicit love, unrequited love and undesired love cheers them up. "How're y'all doing?" is a staple, delivered with a sincere smile.

Once they catch your non-native accent, you'll have to explain where you're from and that you've never met their Aunt Mabel from Belleville.

Naturally, the best thing about Music City is the music — COUNTRY MUSIC in capital letters.

If you don't like the George Jones-Letty Frizzell-Hank Snow-Grandpa Jones-Dottie West-Skeeter Davis school of music, stay away. Nashville is not for the borderline country fan (the ones who only listen to Willie Nelson and Kenny Rogers. Nashville is for fanatics).

Weather fanatics stay at Opryland Hotel, adjacent to Opryland U.S.A., "the world's only musical showpark" (open March 25 through October). Hotel visitors pay \$139 a night plus a whopping 12 percent room tax during the off season.

THE BUDGET-MINDED who have made Opryland park a destination stay across the Music Valley Parkway in sight of Opryland Hotel at Ramada, Shoney's or Fiddler's Inn for considerably less.

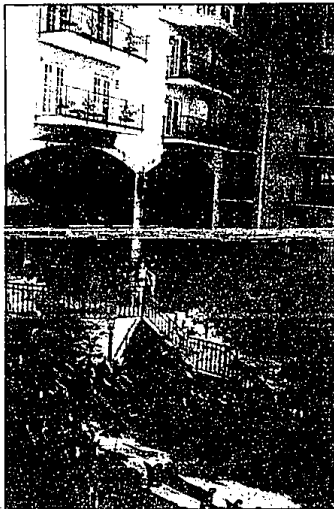
Wherever you stay, you'll want to tour the vast Opryland Hotel just to ogle at the sheer size of it — nearly 1,900 rooms. It is not to be believed unless seen. Picture two acres of tropical plants underneath skylights with dancing fountains and restaurants interspersed. Restaurants with names like Sarah's Kitchen, Rbetti's and the Jack Daniels Saloon.

Breakfast menus here and in other local restaurants are not for cholesterol-watchers — eggs, biscuits and red-eye gravy, ham and sausage, catfish, fried potatoes and grits.

Getting around Nashville is easy, thanks to a circular freeway system. A tour of downtown Nashville is incomplete without a pass through Music Row. You'll know you've found it when you see the parked tour buses.

Individual museums and gift shops have sprouted specifically for the dedicated fans of Loretta Lynn, George Jones, Conway Twitty, Willie Nelson, Minnie Pearl, Alabama and Elvis Presley. Never mind that Presley lived not in Nashville, but Memphis. It's all one state for the fans of the man from Tennessee.

Western boot stores, wax museums, record stores and clothing with fringes are also on the strip, which has a tacky ambience reminiscent of Niagara Falls. Nearby is the center of the commercial country music



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publishing industry, street after street of recording studios and related offices.

Not enough reason to go to Nashville? Here are more:

• THE GRAND OLE Opry, the nation's oldest continuous radio show, with 64 years behind it, broadcasts several times during the weekend from a theater on the grounds of Opryland. A half-hour segment is filmed and broadcast on the Nashville Network. Send ahead for tickets and you can be there for the performance, which features musicians such as Hank Snow and Roy Acuff, who have been around since the 1940s.

• Opryland features a number of live shows on the amusement park grounds, and 21 rides. All-day tickets are less than \$20 for adults. On the grounds and available for an additional charge is a cruise on the General Jackson paddlewheel showboat.

• The Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum is on Music Row. It features highlights from the Grand Ole Opry and memorabilia from noted country stars. A tour of the RCA recording studio is included in the \$9 admission price.

• Nashville Palace is located across from Opryland Hotel and features shows by up-and-coming artists for a reasonable cover charge.

• Ernest Tubb Records has three locations in Nashville. You won't find any Guns 'n' Roses here. You will find all the new releases by country artists and a lot of the out-of-print stuff. At the location on Music Valley, across from the Opryland Hotel, the Midnight Jamboree is held every Saturday with free performances by old standby Opry stars and new talent as well.

If you're only in to the oldies, stop by the Great Escape, a used record store on Broadway. It also features collectible comic books and baseball cards.

• JACK DANIELS Distillery is 70 miles south of Nashville, but it's worth the trip, even if it is in a dry county and you'll never get a sip. A good ol' boy will lead you on an interesting free tour through the nation's oldest registered distillery seven days a week. Our good ol' boy was Randall, great at answering questions:

"How many people work here, Randall?"

"I'd say about half."

There's a souvenir shop of Jack Daniels memorabilia in nearby Lynchburg, but not much else.

There's lots more to Nashville and not all music related — the home of Andrew Jackson, Vanderbilt University, riverboat tours and a tour of Belle Meade Mansion, a former plantation and later a thoroughbred nursery. Or if you haven't had enough country music, several tour companies offer tours of the homes of country stars.

For complete information about Nashville for tourists, contact the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Division, 161 Fourth Avenue North, Nashville, Tennessee 37219. Telephone (615) 259-3900. You'll have a good time.

# Rediscovering the out-of-doors this spring

By Debbie Sklar  
special writer

According to the calendar, spring has arrived. But don't let Old Man Winter fool you. The Detroit area has been known to have snow as late as May.

If you're a hot weather, outdoor enthusiast who complains about the bad weather, read on. There's more than enough things to do — outside — even if the weather is a bit nippy.

Take a day and visit the Alpena Sportsman's Island Wildlife Sanctuary. There you'll find wild fowl feeding areas and roadside parks. There are also quiet nature areas with groomed trails, fishing and viewing platforms. For details, call (517) 356-8021.

For the adventuresome, try the Thunder Bay Underwater Preserve, also in Alpena. Located underwater in Lake Huron's Thunder Bay, you'll find a bottomland preserve, established in 1991, that encompasses 288 square miles.

With approximately 80

shipwrecks, the preserve has one of the highest densities of wrecks, ranging from a 130-foot schooner to a 455-foot steel steamer. For more information, call (517) 354-4191 or 1-800-582-1998.

If you like gardens, wander over to the Matthaei Botanical Gardens in Ann Arbor. There's a conservatory that houses tropical, temperate and desert flora. The grounds include rose, perennial, medicinal, rock and herbal gardens, plus prairie and woodland areas. Call 763-7060 for more information.

OUTDOOR LOVERS also should visit McCalmy Place in Battle Creek. There's a downtown festival marketplace with more than 35 retail shops and express eateries to stroll through. Call (616) 983-7880 for more details.

At Love Creek County Park and Nature Center in Berrien Springs, nature enthusiasts will feel right at home. There are groomed trails, hiking and naturalist programs. Call (616) 471-2617.

In Bloomfield Hills, you can walk through the grounds of Cranbrook, enough to make anyone's winter blues fade away fast. Call 645-3212.

Then there's Chelsea and the Chelsea Killing Company tour, which offers a tour of the home of Jiffy baking mixes. A slide show (with refreshments) explains the production process and is followed by a walking tour of the plant and warehouse areas. Call 475-1361 for details.

If you haven't been on Detroit's People Mover, consider taking a ride. You'll enjoy a breathtaking view of the city as you move quickly, quietly and safely on one of the most technologically advanced transport systems in the world.

You may want to get off at the Grocktown station, where you can walk around, splurge on some flaming goose or buy your mate a fresh red rose from one of the street vendors. Call 982-RAIL for more information.

Whether you're looking for fresh fruits, flowers or vegetables, the Eastern Farmer's Market is the

place to find it. In operation since 1892, this is the largest market of its kind in the United States.

Inside, visitors can bargain with vendors for the freshest vegetables, fruits, meat, cheeses and flowers. Call 833-1560 for more information.

OR CLIMB aboard the trolley in downtown Detroit for a ride. You can get a unique open-air tour of the city, from the Renaissance Center to Grand Circus Park, on one of the antique red and brass trolley cars. Stops include Hart Plaza, Mariner's Church and Cobo Hall. Call 833-7692 for details.

Feeling like a Spartan? How about a tour of Michigan State University? Tour the nation's first land-grant college. It has a 5,100-acre campus and tours include the gardens, museum, planetarium, stadium, carillon tower, art center, farms and classroom facilities. Call (517) 355-4458 for information.

The Fitzgerald Park Ledges in Grand Ledge are wonderful to visit and excellent for beautiful outdoor

photography.

Fitzgerald Park is best known for the view of the ledges along the Grand River. The ledges are sedimentary rock outcroppings and a popular recreational and educational area, due to their unique geological formation.

The park has a nature center, fish ladder, three miles of nature trails, three picnic pavilions and various play and picnic areas to accommodate large groups. Call (517) 627-7351 for details.

Take a trip up to Hartwick Pines State Park in Grayling for a fun afternoon. This 49-acre preserve of towering virgin white pine stands as a living reminder of Michigan's once-famous northern forests. An interpretive center focuses on lumbering history. Additional attractions include a log memorial building, the Lumberman's Museum and the Chapel in the Pines. Call (517) 348-7088 for more information.

How about a visit to view the exterior architecture of the State Capitol Building in Lansing? This is one of

the first state capitols to emulate the dome and wing of the U.S. Capitol in Washington.

THE MICHIGAN State Capitol, completed in 1878, is considered an architectural gem and an outstanding example of Victorian craftsmanship. Call (517) 335-1463 for information.

Animal lovers should put the Detroit Zoological Park in Royal Oak on their agenda. It's the first zoo in the United States to use barrier dwellings to exhibit more than 300 species of animals.

Some of its 1,200 specimens include polar bears, Ugers and penguins, which the zoo is noted for, and countless birds, reptiles and mammals found in natural habitat settings and in the park's lakes and flower gardens. Call 398-0903 for details.

If golf is more your speed, the state has enough courses, driving ranges and resorts to keep you busy for a long time. For locations and more information, call the Michigan Travel Bureau toll-free at 1-800-5432-YES.